

The Influence of Abraham Lincoln

The Growth of His Influence and His Religious Life

By Rev. William E. Barton, D.D.

Author of "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln"

America is large and is growing larger. Once she was a thin strip of cleared land, bounded on the East by the vast ocean and on the West by the unexplored wilderness. Gradually she stretched westward till the Pacific Ocean was her boundary toward the going down of the sun. Now she extends westward to Hawaii and to the Philippines, and no man dare say in terms of her international influence just where she is bounded Eastward. Those fields in Flanders and in France where her sons lie buried, those lands of the Near East that have been rescued from starvation and anarchy by her generosity, are bound to us by ties stronger than political bands and have given to the United States new areas, if not of territory at least of moral power and of moral responsibility.

But as America has grown, the fame of her great men has grown with it. The man who incarnated America's ideal when America was thirteen small colonies, still worthily incarnates that ideal when America is forty-eight great states and half a world besides. Abraham Lincoln, who was doubtfully admitted to a place among America's great men while he was living, and while the North and South were at strife, is now the hero not only of North and South, but of an internationalized America. Our nation has expanded, our ideals have grown, our conception of what great men might be has vastly enlarged, but Washington and Lincoln are still adequate.

COMPLETING OUR ESTIMATE

We are nearing the time for a correct estimate of the life and character of Abraham Lincoln. Our knowledge of him is not yet quite complete. There still remain people who knew him and whose personal reminiscences as yet are unpublished. But that number is rapidly diminishing; nor is it at all likely that we have anything to learn about him which will greatly modify our view. More has been written about him than about any other man of modern times unless it be Napoleon. The sources of information have been more diligently explored than in the case of any other man in American history. One thing grows more certain as the years go by and that is that his influence has not yet reached its zenith. Great as is the love which America holds for him, it is a growing affection and is certain to grow in the South as well as in the North.

Nor is the fame of Lincoln limited to America. The great world war has been significant in this as in many other things, that it has brought a world recognition such as he never had before to America's noblest exponent of America's spirit. The nations that joined with us in fighting to make the world safe for democracy needed a definition of democracy and they found it in his words; they needed an exponent of democracy, and they found it in his personality. Abraham Lincoln is more than America's first American. He is the world's foremost world citizen.

THE RELIGION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I should like to say something on a subject about which too much has been said already—the religion of Abraham Lincoln—a subject to which it would be easier to devote a volume than a paragraph. A great deal that has been written on this subject, part of it by truthful and honest people, I do not accept as true. Nor have I room to give in detail the reasons for what I do believe concerning him. I believe that he was a Christian, although never a member of a Christian church. I believe that

his spiritual life was an evolution and that we can trace with some degree of accuracy its processes and successive stages.

The background of Lincoln's early religious life was that of the old-fashioned, pioneer, close-communion, Calvinistic Baptists. This made him a fatalist to the end of his life. In his later approaches to some of the tenets of Universalism he was still the uncompromising Calvinist, reasoning to a different conclusion but from the same premises as those held by the Baptist preachers whom he had known. With this there mingled a strong tendency to rationalism, gained as a young man from reading the works of Volney and Paine, a tendency accentuated by an inborn and almost morbid caution.

To this was added in 1850 a new argument for the evidences of Christianity, which now for the first time seemed to him to have a basis in formal logic. When all deductions have been made it is impossible to escape the conviction that his mind underwent a certain change toward religion early in 1850 after the death of his little son Edward and his reading of a book, "The Christian's Defense," which no biographer of Lincoln ever has read or owned, but

in the working of God through natural forces and for what he called the operation of "miracles under law."

THE STRAIN OF SUPERSTITION

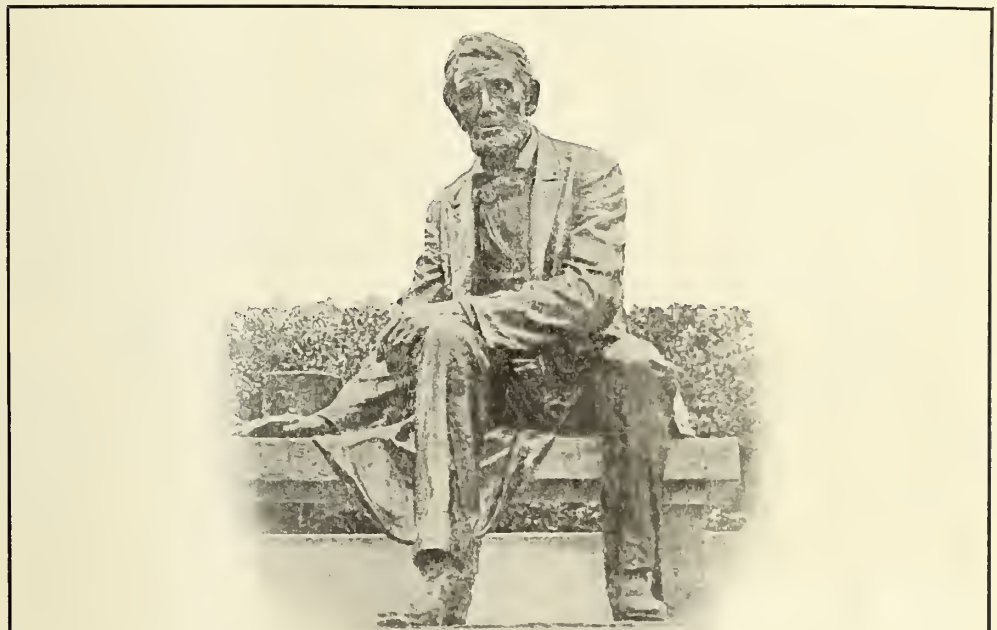
Besides all this, there was in Lincoln and in his wife a marked strain of superstition such as is common to frontier life and which always had a strong hold, if not upon his intelligence, at least upon his sub-consciousness.

It need not surprise us when we analyze his religion into its component parts to find it made up of more or less inconsistent and even contrary elements. If any of his ideas were inconsistent with each other they were all consistent with the mind and character of the man.

He believed in God; he believed in duty; he believed in immortality; he believed in prayer. He had a solemn covenant registered in heaven to perform his duty faithfully and when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation he told his cabinet in quiet words that hushed all opposition that he had promised his God to do that thing.

THE RELIGIOUS PROCESSES OF CHANGE

Lincoln's religion underwent something the same evolution, and exhibited some similarities



THE UNFINISHED WORK

By Joseph F. Folsom

The crowd was gone, and to the side
Of Borglum's Lincoln, deep in awe,
I crept. It seem'd a mighty tide
Within those aching eyes I saw.

"Great heart," I said, "why grieve away?
The battle's ended and the shout
Shall ring forever and a day—
Why sorrow yet, or doubly doubt?"

"Freedom," I plead, "so nobly won
For all mankind, an equal right,
Shall with the ages travel on
Till time shall cease, and day be night."

No answer—then; but up the slope,
With broken gait, and hands in clench,
A toiler came, bereft of hope,
And sank beside him on the bench.

which Lincoln pronounced "unanswerable." A still further and to some extent contemporary development came out of his reading of "The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," the only book on evolution which he ever read, which gave him a rational basis for his belief

of contrast and contradiction, as the development of his literary style. He was a great story teller; yet you may read his speeches from end to end and hardly find a story. His favorite poet was Robert Burns, and you may read his speeches from end to end and not find a single

quotation from the Scottish poet. His early style was highly rhetorical, almost ridiculously so, full of pretentious, high-sounding phrases. He then developed the controversial style of the stump speaker, sometimes with rude jokes and boisterous gestures and platform performances. His style became one of calm dignity and his English was a pure well of Anglo-Saxon undiluted.

His moral and spiritual evolution went hand in hand with this development of his literary method. He made his religious system out of such material as he found at hand and he wrought it into shape by the slow processes of a mind that never worked rapidly but always accurately and surely. Into it also he wrought his stern demand for a reasonable faith, his conception of what constituted the essentials of Divine justice and the affirmations of a nature which was inherently and profoundly religious. The mighty responsibilities of the war developed his spiritual nature. The solemn duties which daily he had to face kept him humble before God and profoundly awake to

the will of the people. The larger implications of the slavery issue grew in his mind into a conviction that he was an instrument of Providence. In 1854 he believed that a house divided against itself could not stand. By the end of 1862 he was able to express his view of emancipation in these immortal words, perhaps the noblest which Lincoln ever uttered:

"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last and best hope of earth."

He believed that his own personal responsibility to God was such that he could not permit America to lose the world's last and best hope. He freed the slave because in doing so he fulfilled a promise which he had made to his God.

There is a stirring line in one of the poems of Sam Walter Foss:

"Give me men to match my mountains."

It is the cry of America to the people of America; it is the demand that America shall

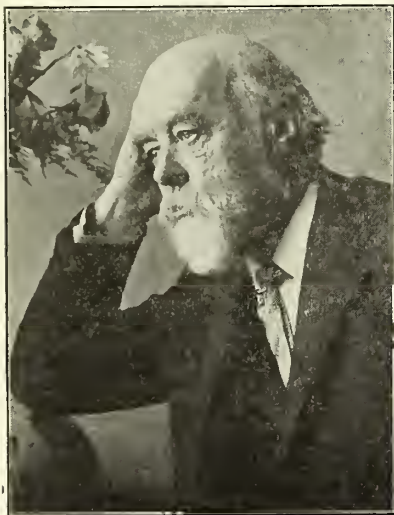
be measured not by her territory but by the character of her people; not by her machinery but by her manhood. We have inherited great names from older nations. Shakespeare and Cromwell and John Bunyan were not born in the United States. We claim them as our own by kinship with their spirits. But America is not shut up to the necessity of receiving from other nations the inspiration of great names and having none of her own to bequeath. She has inherited from other lands great names that incarnate great ideals; and she has given to other lands an ideal of high-minded patriotism, combined with military and political leadership and crowned with the glory of heroism, integrity, and devotion to the public weal and with it has given the name of Washington. Then she has defined democracy in terms of authority as residing in the people and righteousness as expressed in the will of the people, and of kindness and of humanity and conscience as expressed in a heroic life that sprang from among the people, and has called that ideal by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

Sir Oliver Lodge — Believer in the Unseen

A Platform Pen Picture

By H. A. B.

A large and fashionable auditorium crowded to its doors; the 2,500 persons seated on the floor and galleries, the two hundred on the platform, the hundreds standing in the wall aisles



SIR OLIVER LODGE

are looking eagerly at a commanding figure in the center of the stage. In faultless evening clothes, tall, portly, slightly stooping, with a bushy white beard giving a patriarchal appearance to his keen, sensitive face, Sir Oliver Lodge would be recognized anywhere as a thinker and a leader. England has sent to America in recent years no better representative of the culture and the forceful personal qualities associated with men of the Anglo-Saxon breed.

Many in the audience have waited long even for standing room. This throng of three thousand persons—what has drawn them to a place where for one hour and three-quarters they will hear a lecture, with not a single reference to Bolshevism or Americanism, touched only now and then by humor and charged with no emotionalism or appeal to the conscience or the will? Are these people simply seekers for novelty? Most of them, if that were the motive, would have gone to the playhouses only a block or two away. One surmises, as he looks over the sea of eager faces, that many a man and woman carries in the heart a wound never fully

healed, a yearning that will never be completely satisfied until some form of reunion with the departed comes to pass. Parents there were who had lost their sons in France, friends who grieve for the sight of a vanished form loved long since and lost a while. Then too there must have been present many who, while they may not have known personal bereavement in its keenest phases, are haunted by that age-long question, "If a man die shall he live again?" I sat by a hard-headed business man from another state, who confessed that for years now he had been interested in spiritualism and that he had received in writing communications from the spirit world, whose authenticity he could not deny.

Well, what did Sir Oliver have to corroborate the faith of these who believe that there is communication with those who have gone, or to confute a skeptic? His sincerity, high-mindedness, simplicity and absolute confidence in results obtained were apparent from start to finish. After making clear the distinction between mind and body, Sir Oliver went on to assert that personal survival is inevitable, and asked us to be willing to wait until the scientific proof is completed. He warned his hearers against spurious messages through fraudulent mediums. He affirmed incidentally and in a most matter-of-fact way, that he had had communications with his son Raymond who died in the war. He spent some time relating the communications sent by his friend, Mr. F. W. H. Myers. He declared that the boys who died in the war were happy in the other world and wanted to be in communication with those whom they left behind.

Did he convince his auditors? How can you absolutely convince any one who has not gone through the same experience of its validity? Sir Oliver did not undertake to prove his case logically. He simply bore witness to what he said that he himself has heard and seen. How much he is helping people generally who are hearing him in this country to attain similar assuredness remains to be seen, or what gain will come to religion in an appreciable amount of larger knowledge arising from such researches into the unseen. So much machinery seems to be involved in effecting intercourse with the departed that its use appears to be limited to those who, like Sir Oliver Lodge, possess the cool scientific temper. He himself

apparently believes that in the transaction as a rule four parties are involved, the inquirer and the medium on this side, and on the other side of the veil the person called the medium's control and the spirit with whom communication is desired. Moreover, he admits the possibility of "mischievous and temporary impersonations." All this ought to discourage amateurs from dabbling with ouija boards and table tipping. He thinks that only in certain individuals is born the power to communicate with the dead, that this power may be cultivated like the talent for music and art, and that the simpler the life one lives here the stronger the tie with those who have gone before. This would certainly rule out as successful communicators the giddy throng who are out just for an evening's revelry. In contrast to the frauds and foolishness connected with miscellaneous delvings into the unseen, the work of Sir Oliver Lodge is of a totally different type. Its bearing on Christian ethics and Christian theology still remains to be determined but this much, at least, is to the good and for it we may well thank Sir Oliver. In a day when hearts are sad and the pall of material things and interests

Sir Oliver Lodge

JUNE 12, 1851, born, son of a Staffordshire (England) physician.

Fitted himself at evening school for University College, London, from which he graduated with honors in 1877.

Became Assistant Professor of Physics. One of the first discoverers of the principle of wireless telegraphy—preceded Signor Marconi with practical demonstrations and constructed the coherer.

1881—1900, Professor of Physics in University College, Liverpool.

1900, became principal of the University of Birmingham, from which he has just resigned.

1902, knighted by the king.

lies heavy on so great a part of the world, he is helping us to realize that the enduring realities lie in the spiritual world and that we are in the very midst of it moment by moment.